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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Fifth Meeting of the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee on the Integration of Women in Development

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LC/NAIROBI

REPORT ON THE SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN

A. BACKGROUND

1. The second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the Preparatory Body for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, was convened in Vienna, Austria from 27 February to 7 March 1984. It should be recalled that the Commission held its first session as a Preparatory Body in February/March 1983 in Vienna. During that session, it made a number of recommendations which were subsequently adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1983/132 and by the General Assembly in its resolution 38/108. These included the provisional agenda for the World Conference, relevant documentation, preparatory meetings and activities, as well as publicity for the Conference. Administrative and financial implications of these recommendations were also endorsed by the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session.

2. The second session of the Preparatory Body concentrated its attention on a number of outstanding issues. These included date and duration of the World Conference, organization and structure of the Conference, participation in the Conference, additional documentation on specific issues, and rules of procedures encompassing election of officers other than the President and representation on the General Committee of the Conference.

B. ATTENDANCE FROM THE AFRICA REGION

3. It was encouraging to note that six out of the eight African member States of the Commission on the Status of Women were in attendance, namely: Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Togo, Zaire and Zambia. The two members not represented were Liberia and Sierra Leone. In addition, several observers representing national governments, United Nations organizations, and nongovernmental organizations participated in the meeting. African countries represented by observers included Algeria, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, United Republic of Cameroon, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania and Upper Volta. This was a significant representation from the African Region. It is essential that the needs of African women, and the African position on the various issues included in the proposed agenda of the World Conference, be clearly articulated and heard at the sessions of the Preparatory Body. It is one way of ensuring that the voice of Africa and diversity of situations in the world, are adequately taken into account in Nairobi, in 1985.

C. DECISION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The Preparatory Body made a number of decisions and recommendations for consideration and endorsement by ECOSOC and the General Assembly. These are briefly as follows:

Rules of Procedures

5. The Preparatory Body postponed decisions on this issue until its third session, in view of the fact that standard rules of procedures for United Nations Conferences are under consideration by the United Nations General Assembly. Approval by the General Assembly would simplify the decision of the Preparatory Body on the matter.

Dates and Duration of the Conference

6. The Preparatory Body agreed that the World Conference should be held from 15 to 26 July 1985. Two days prior to the Conference, 13 to 14 July, would be devoted to pre-conference consultations.

Allocation of Work

7. The Conference should consist of a plenary and two main committees, all of which will meet simultaneously. Items on the provisional agenda will be allocated as follows:

Plenary:	Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9,
Committee I:	Item 8 at the national level,
Committee II:	Item 9 at the regional and international levels.

Participation in the Conference

8. The following should be invited to participated in the Conference:

a) all States
b) Namibia represented by the United Nations Council for Namibia
c) representatives of organizations with a standing invitation to participate as observers in United Nations conferences in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237(XXIX) and 31/152
d) representatives of national liberation movements recognized by OAU in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 3280(XXIX) as observers
e) specialized agencies and IAEC
f) other interested inter-governmental organizations
g) non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC, as observers.

Presidency of the Conference

9. The Preparatory Body endorsed the practice of electing the Head of Delegation from the host country as President of the Conference.

Allocation of seats in the General Committee of the Conference

10. The General Committee of the Conference consists of the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Rapporteur-General, and presiding officers of the two main committees. The Preparatory Body deferred decision on this issue until its third session, by which time it is expected that the General Assembly would have adopted the draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations Conferences.

Participation of non-governmental organizations

11. Many representatives were in support of having an NGO meeting in connexion with the World Conference. Some wanted the meeting to take place before the Conference; others however wanted both to be held simultaneously. After the session of the Preparatory Body, the NGO Committee held a meeting at which it was decided to hold the NGO meeting from 10 to 19 July 1985. The NGOs are also interested in holding meetings in connexion with regional preparatory meetings.

Preparatory Work on the basic documentation to be submitted to the World Conference

12. The documentation envisaged for the World Conference is as follows:

National Review and Appraisal

13. As of 24 February, only nine countries (from Africa, Equatorial Guinea) had returned completed questionnaires to the Secretariat. This raised much concern among the delegates to the Preparatory Body, who urged member States to complete and submit their replies soonest. It is suggested that ARCC consider this matter and propose concrete measures to assist to in expediting replies from African countries to the questionnaire.

14. Concerning the content of the report, it was emphasized that it should identify areas in which considerable progress had been achieved and those in which progress had been slow, highlighting obstacles encountered. It should provide a balanced treatment of the themes:equality, development and peace and present a detailed analysis of the subthemes: employment, health and education. Special attention to rural women was emphasized by a number of representatives. One representative proposed that a special report should be prepared on refugee women. A recommendation to this effect, proposed by the Africa group was adopted.

World Survey

15. The World Survey on the Role of Women had been originally requested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 35/78 of 5 December 1980, and 36/74 of 4 December 1981. The General Assembly emphasized the need for a multisectoral and interdisciplinary survey on the role of women in development. It should analyse women's role in relation to key developmental issues as envisaged by the International Development Strategy of the Third United Nations Development Decade, focussing in particular on trade, agriculture, industry, energy, money and finance, and science and technology. At its first session, the Preparatory Body recommended that the World Survey on the Role of Women should constitute one of the basic documents for the World Conference. This recommendation was endorsed by ECOSOC in its decision 1983/132 of 26 May 1983.

16. The proposed structure of the World Survey had been completed by the Secretariat of the World Conference, and many representatives commended the comprehensive approach. Appropriate organizations and agencies of the United Nations system are collaborating in its preparation.

Review and Appraisal by the United Nations System

17. A representative from the United Nations Office of Personnel Services in New York made a brief presentation on the status of women in the Secretariat, including the regional commissions. She reported that 22.3 per cent of the professional posts subject to geographical distribution were currently filled by women. The proportion was higher at Headquarters than at the regional commissions and higher at lower and middle levels than at senior levels. She urged member States to present women candidates, especially in those subject areas in which they are underrepresented. A questionnaire on the topic is being finalized and will be circulated to United Nations organizations for completion.

Statistics and Indicators

18. The United Nations Statistical Office (UNSO) has made much progress in the development of statistical data on the situation of women. UNSO was working in close collaboration with Department of Technical Co-operation and Development (DTCD), INSTRAW and the regional commissions to organize training workshops and seminars on the subject. Several representatives noted the importance of indicators in the formulation of forward-looking strategies. A number of representatives emphasized that the experts involved should be well acquainted with the problems of women in the developing countries.

Forward-looking Strategies

19. The Secretariat of the World Conference is undertaking a thorough examination of the experience gained during the Decade as part of the preparation of the report on forward-looking strategies. All relevant documents prepared by the United Nations system will be taken into account, including reports on review and appraisal, the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, current reports on the world social situation and on the world economic survey, and reports of the regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings. The time frame will be 15 years (1985-2000). Strategies will be proposed for immediate action (to 1990) and for long-term action (to 2000).

20. The Preparatory Body emphasized the need for practical and qualitative short-term as well as long-term strategies. Representatives stressed the importance of the review and appraisal and the identification of obstacles as bases for formulating strategies. A number of delegates stressed the importance of giving priority to women in rural and poor urban areas. (The Africa Group proposed a recommendation on rural women which was adopted). Women under apartheid were also mentioned as as needing priority, and a recommendation to this effect (by the Africa group) was adopted. Other delegates suggested strategies for other special groups of women including migrant, refugee, displaced, elderly, abused, young women, single mothers and women belonging to indigenous minority groups.

Women under Apartheid

21. It should be recalled that the first session of the Preparatory Body could not reach a consensus on the inclusion in the agenda of the World Conference items dealing with women under apartheid and women under occupied Arab territories. These issues were subsequently discussed by the General Assembly at its 38th Session. In its resolution 38/108 of 16 December 1983 the General Assembly, inter alia, recommended that "within the framework of agenda item 7 particular attention will be paid to the problems of women in territories under racist colonial rule and in territories under foreign occupation on the basis of appropriate documentation from the international conferences at Mexico and Copenhagen on women under the themes equality, development and peace...". Pursuant to the General Assembly resolution, the second session of the Preparatory Body adopted a recommendation (proposed by the Africa group) requesting the Secretary-General "in preparing the documentation called for in General Assembly resolution 38/108 on the situation of women under apartheid, to update the documentation from the two World Conferences .... in close consultation with the Economic Commission for Africa". It is hoped that a relevant recommendation on this issue will be adopted at the Africa Regional Conference.

Reports and recommendations of regional conferences

22. Repeated mention was made of the importance of regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings for the World Conference. The reports and recommendations of these meetings are expected to be ready for the third session of the Preparatory Body, to be held in February/March 1985. The Africa Regional Preparatory meeting is expected to take place from 3 to 7 September in Arusha, Tanzania.

Information Activities and Publicity

23. The Department of Public Information (DPI) is co-ordinating action on publicity for the Conference. Preparation of posters with the Decade logo and other publications are underway. The United Nations Information Centres have been asked to make special efforts to publicise the World Conference. Five fellowship are being provided to five journalists (from each region) to attend and publicise each of the regional preparatory meetings.

Special Trust Fund

24. The first session of the Preparatory Body recommended the establishment of a special trust fund for the World Conference. This was subsequently endorsed by ECOSOC and the General Assembly. A number of countries (Federal Republic of Germany, France, Japan, Madagascar and Oman) and private donors have contributed to the trust fund, in the amount of US$260,000. Most of the contributions are in the forms of staff support; only US$20,000 is in cash.

Assistance to Least-Developed Countries

25. The Secretary-General of the World Conference appealed for assistance to the least-developed countries (presently 36, out of which 26 are African countries) to attend both the regional meetings and the World Conference. Since the majority of these countries are in the Africa Region, it is strongly suggested that African countries take up this issue, especially through their delegations to the next session of the United Nations General Assembly.